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THE LYRICAL CONCEIT OF THE ELIZABETHANS

BY RAYMOND MACDONALD ALDEN

In common, I am sure, with many students of the history of poetry, I have often used the term "conceit" with the secret wish that I knew what I really meant by it. At other times I have felt almost sure that I had captured the type, but have coveted a better understanding of its uses and effects in poetry, and have sought in vain for any adequate analysis or classification of them. I soon discovered that the term was used in very different senses by different critics, and that, even when they seemed to agree on the phenomenon under consideration, they might disagree as to whether it was poetic or anti-poetic in character. It is the object of this paper to make some inquiry regarding the general subject, especially with reference to the problem of definition and classification, and to present a few definite facts in a portion of the field. There have been, of course, two periods when English poetry was especially marked by the importance of the conceit as an element of lyrical form or method,—that of the Elizabethan sonnet, and that of the freer lyric of the period from Jonson to Cowley. Traditionally, these periods are represented respectively by the "Petrarchan" conceit and the "metaphysical." In the present paper I shall confine myself to the former, and shall include for special study only the sonnets of Sidney and Shakespeare,—incomparably the finest collections of English lyrics of the Petrarchan school. I shall also leave out of account the important historical aspects of the subject, such as the relation of the lyrical conceits of the English poets to their continental predecessors; but I hope to suggest some things which may contribute toward a sound method of investigating these matters.

In the first place let me point out briefly what is "the state of the question" regarding the use of the term "conceit" with reference to poetry. The *New English Dictionary* defines it as "a fanciful, ingenious, or witty notion or expression; now applied disparagingly to a strained or far-fetched turn of thought, figure, etc., an affectation of thought or style." A typical example of the earlier use is from John Bell, 1581, who spoke of a "tongue . . . framed to pretty conceits;" of the later use, a remark of the late J. A. Symonds, to the effect that "the Greeks had no conceits: they did not call the

waves 'nodding hearse-plumes' . . . or laburnums 'dropping wells of fire.'"¹ The essence of the later use, it will be noticed, is the element of disparagement.

Of recent critical works in which one might look for some account of this subject, the only ones to give it at all the attention it deserves are Mr. Courthope's *History of English Poetry* and Professor Schelling's volume on *English Literature in the Lifetime of Shakespeare*. The former writer does not, indeed, discuss the term "conceit," but gives a well-known and very interesting account of the various types of "poetical wit" in which the subject is included. In general, his discussion is based on the traditional view of the "metaphysical" conceit, especially as defined by Dr. Johnson as "a kind of *discordia concors*, a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."² The value of Courthope's account has, I suppose, been obscured by his rather eccentric historical generalizations, familiar to all readers of his *History*,—such as that the poetic wit of the Renaissance is due to "the decay of the scholastic philosophy and the feudal system."³ In contrast, Professor Schelling's discussion of the conceit is marked by simplicity and a concern for the concrete facts. He defines it as originally a product of "the effort on the part of the poet to deck out his thought in striking, apt, and original figures of speech and illustration," and proceeds to say that "such an effort easily degenerates into ingenuity, far-fetched metaphor, extravagance, and want of taste; for all these things came in time to characterize the conceit to such an extent that the original idea was lost, and a conceit came restrictedly to mean 'any conventional device of the poet—fancy, figure, or illustration—used to give individual, transcendent expression to the thing he has to say.'"⁴ Here we should notice the term "conventional," which seems to be somewhat paradoxically related

¹ *Greek Poets*, x, 324.

² From the Life of Cowley. Schelling has pointed out (in his Introduction to *Seventeenth Century Lyrics*, p. xxv) that Johnson's use of the term "metaphysical" is probably derived from Dryden's remark that Donne "affects the metaphysics, . . . and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts." (*Discourse on Satire*.) But Grierson has noted the use of the term "concetti metafisici" in Testi (d. 1646). (*Donne's Poetical Works*, vol. ii, p. 1.)

³ Vol. iii, p. 105.

⁴ Page 127. Schelling implies that the quoted definition is from an unpublished paper by Professor C. G. Child.

to the notion of ingenuity and extravagance already introduced; in other words, we have the concettist blamed in the first place for inventing far-fetched and unheard-of images, and in the next place for using these images when they have become merely conventional. And this represents a corresponding paradox of definition in criticism generally. On the one hand, Donne's notions are called conceits because of their strangeness, while on the other those of the early sonneteers are called so because of their triteness. In this connection I recall an interesting paper by Dr. M. B. Ogle, on "The White Hand as a Literary Conceit,"⁵ in which the conventional notion of blond beauty is brought under our present subject; at one point the writer remarks, "Many such conceits appear in the poetry of Theocritus, . . . e. g., 'milk-white Galatea.' " Obviously, if notional phrases like this are conceits, Greek poetry—and early English likewise—is full of conceit, in contradiction to the statement of Symonds as quoted above.

The common habit of referring to conceits as far-fetched or ingenious figures must have led many of us to wonder where the line should be drawn between them and normal examples of metaphorical imagery. What is a "far-fetched" metaphor? and is it necessarily a poetic fault to be ingenious? Is it a conceit, for example, to call an ancient Greek urn an "unravished bride of quietness," or to say that the song of an unseen skylark is like a glow-worm hidden in a dell, or that Helen's face "launched a thousand ships, and burnt the topless towers of Ilium"? I recall but one instance where a critic has undertaken with some care to make the distinction between normal figure and conceit, namely, in Mr. E. K. Chambers's introduction to the volume of the *Red Letter Shakespeare* containing the Sonnets. Here it is said that a figure loses the character of "a just image" and becomes a conceit, (1) if the element of similarity is less obvious than dissimilarity; or (2) if the expressiveness of the comparison is obscured by the ingenuity of the discoverer; or (3) if it lacks imaginative concreteness and vividness; or (4) if it is below the level of its theme. A number of queries are suggested by these distinctions, which cannot fairly be taken up without a fuller discussion of Mr. Chambers's examples than is possible here; but I shall say one or two things briefly. I am sure that we all recognize the meaning of the second of the four distinctions, and its appropriateness to one common use of the term conceit. But as to the others

⁵ *Sewanee Review*, vol. xx, p. 459.

it seems to me that the statements amount practically to the doctrine that a conceit is a poor metaphor, and to use the term in this way leads to no useful end. I do not even recognize the first distinction as necessarily marking a metaphor as peculiar or inferior, and I am further hindered from doing so when Mr. Chambers chooses for illustration the familiar Elizabethan comparison of a tear to a pearl. A pearl, says he, differs so strikingly from a tear, in its "hard white opacity," that the analogy of roundness is obscured; hence the comparison is a conceit. Or again, in Shakespeare's lines—

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date,

he tells us that the first of these images is a just metaphor, but that the second is a conceit, because the legal figure of a lease is a piece of "professional erudition," and does not bring up a sensuous image. But surely we cannot admit that every poetical analogy must concern concrete visible objects. And when it comes to measuring up likeness with unlikeness, should we not find that in almost every metaphor the account of the latter would immensely outweigh that of the former? To recur to a former example, how numerous are the points of dissimilarity between the skylark's song and a glow-worm, compared with the single point of likeness seized upon by Shelley!

Another discussion of the conceit, very brief but worthy of attention, is that of Dean Beeching in the Muses' Library edition of Crashaw's poems. Here, as with Dr. Johnson and (in part) Mr. Chambers, the emphasis is laid on the element of ingenuity as compared with a sense of truth; and Beeching adds the interesting remark that this same distinction "seems to be the grain of truth at the bottom of the more pretentious distinction between the images of the 'fancy' and the 'imagination,' of which Coleridge, and after him Ruskin, have made so much."⁶ In other words, a conceit may be viewed as an image presented by what Coleridge and Wordsworth call the *fancy*, a faculty concerned with the superficial appearances of things; while a just metaphor may be regarded as the product of their *imagination*, which is concerned with the real resemblances between things and the truth thus signified. This is an intelligible distinction, and could be applied rather takingly to some of the examples noted

⁶ Page xlvii.

by Wordsworth.⁷ It is nevertheless open to some question; for imagery to which the term conceit would ordinarily be applied is used by some poets for the presentation, with undeniable seriousness, of what they view as important truths. For example, it is not infrequently employed by the sacred poets to express the mystery of the Incarnation,—never more finely than by Crashaw in his “Holy Nativity,” where the shepherds represent the powers of heaven and earth as contending to make a bed for the infant Christ, then argue—

The Babe whose birth embraces this morn
Made His own bed ere He was born.

But further, some of the most interesting conceits of both the Petrarchan and the “metaphysical” school are not based on imagery; they are not mere elaborated (or distorted) metaphors and similes, but represent mental processes quite apart from the sensuous imagination. It is the chief value of Mr. Courthope’s discussion, in which he connects this poetic element with certain philosophic phenomena, that he recognizes and emphasizes the kind of conceit I refer to. To define the conceit, then, with sole reference to the imaginative figures of speech, is to stop short of this type.

Along what line, then, shall we seek a working definition? Not, I think, as I have indicated, by making the distinction between conceits and ordinary figures one of vice and virtue—vicious as the conceit may frequently seem to be. Neither should we emphasize too fully the matter of remoteness or eccentricity, as in itself decisive; for it is obvious, in that case, not only that a normal imaginative figure might become a conceit by sufficient repetition, or a conceit become a normal figure, but also that what would be a normal figure

⁷ Indeed he himself uses the term “conceit” in this connection: “I will content myself with placing a conceit (ascribed to Lord Chesterfield) in contrast with a passage from the *Paradise Lost*:

The dews of the evening most carefully shun,
They are the tears of the sky for the loss of the sun.

After the transgression of Adam, Milton, with other appearances of sympathising Nature, thus marks the immediate consequence,—

Sky lowered, and, muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal sin,

The associating link is the same in each instance. . . . A flash of surprise is the effect in the former case; a flash of surprise, and nothing more; for the nature of things does not sustain the combination. In the latter, the effects of the act, of which there is this immediate consequence and visible sign, are so momentous that the mind acknowledges the justice and reasonableness of the sympathy in nature so manifested.” (Preface of 1815; *Works*, Globe edition, p. 884.)

for one group of readers would be a conceit for another.⁸ The sounder method of analysis, it seems, is to inquire what the process of composition may be which we find producing certain characteristic effects in the verse of given types or periods, and thus to arrive inductively at *something* which deserves a characteristic name.

Word-plays are the most elementary, as—according to the general view—they are the most contemptible of the ingenuities of the old lyricists. It is a fair question whether a mere pun is a matter of enough significance for the poetic art to be dubbed with even the none too honorable name of conceit; yet we know that it has been dignified as Paronomasia, and listed by rhetoricians as one of the figures. What is more to the purpose, the pun (and similar verbal quibbles), as used by the poets, has at least as much imaginative force as the figure of antithesis; and every student of Elizabethan literature knows that it was used in a manner somewhat akin to that figure,—frequently without any sense of comic effect. Elaborated for poetic ends, then, it is apparently entitled to, and commonly receives, the name of conceit. Antony's

O world, thou wast the forest to this hart,
And this indeed, O world, the heart of thee,

and Laertes'

Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears

(I draw upon the drama instead of the lyric, for the moment, because of the familiarity of the passages)—these word-plays show clearly how deeply emotional might be the character of conceits even of this disallowed type.

When we pass to the more strictly imaginative figures, of which metaphorical images and those akin to them are the chief, it is still more difficult to draw the line between the mere figure and the conceit. Perhaps the distinction must be in good part a subjective

⁸ I do not deny, however, the possibility of this latter condition. My friend Professor W. D. Briggs has suggested to me that the use of a remote or highly technical subject-matter, such as requires the reader to pause for adequate understanding of a figure, is sometimes a characteristic element in a conceit, and that it is therefore possible that such legal figures (for example) as are so abundant in the Elizabethan sonnet may have this effect of the conceit for us, when they would not have had it for the poets' contemporaries. I take this occasion to add that I have discussed the subject of this paper so fully with Dr. Briggs that, while he is far from being responsible for any part of it, I am not sure how some of my observations may be due to his aid.

matter. For example, I find that to call tears pearls is a perfectly normal metaphor, though we have seen that it offends one critic and for him becomes a conceit. But when Shakespeare says,

Ah! but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,
And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds,

I feel that the metaphor has been elaborated to form a conceit. Again, to compare the eyes of a beautiful friend with stars is a natural metaphor, struck out swiftly by the animated imagination; but when Sidney, in his 26th Sonnet, or Shakespeare in his 14th, says that he consults the starry eyes of his beloved, like an astrologer, for prognostication, a similar development has taken place. Yet once more, I should find it normal enough—despite the dislike of Mr. Chambers and others for figures drawn from legal processes—that a poet should speak of a friend as making himself his surety, or giving bond for him; but we should all agree in finding a conceit in Shakespeare's Sonnet 134, the argument of which, reduced to dry prose, runs somewhat as follows:

If you will restore my friend to me, I will forfeit my mortgage to your will; he came to you giving bond as my surety, and you are a usurer if you sue one who incurred debt for my sake.

It is obvious that conceits like this conform to the test proposed by some of the critics I have cited,—namely, by attracting more attention to the ingenuity of the poet than to the justice of the analogy he presents. Yet the real test, I think, is something a little different from this: it is whether we have been obliged to do something more than apprehend the analogy in the usual imaginative flash which a metaphor produces—to engage in a logical (or otherwise intellectual) process in order to perceive its significance. When this is the case, it is quite true that a natural result will be that we shall be disposed to give more attention to the process of elaboration than to the thing signified.⁹

What is true of metaphor and simile is of course true of personification—really a special form of metaphor. Here the normal process is a rapid and purely imaginative one; “my mouth refuses to speak” is a normal instance. But Sidney, in his 80th Sonnet, tells us that his mouth refuses to praise Stella's lips further, for fear of flattering;

⁹ Here, then, I find myself in closer agreement with Mr. Chambers, when he says: “Many images become conceits merely by over-elaboration, when detail is added to detail until the symbol becomes an object of interest in itself, instead of indirectly conveying something which is not itself.” (Page 14)

those lips, however, by giving his mouth a kiss, will teach it that no praise can exceed the truth. Here the elaborative process has developed a conceit, through a charming accessory use of logical reasoning.

Metaphor or personification, or both together, may be so elaborated as to tell a complete story of a symbolic sort, which, if it follows certain well-marked lines, we may call allegory; at other times it becomes a kind of myth,—as when, for example, almost any Renaissance poet tells his beloved either that she has stolen her complexion and breath from the flowers, or that the flowers have taken their hue and odor from her. Now if the details of the symbolic development are related to each other so closely as to form a single vivid imaginative whole, we say simply that we have a perfect piece of symbolism, or a perfect allegory; but if they are so complicated or incongruous as to require a bit of special reasoning to make them intelligible, they may be said to take on the nature of a conceit. The imagery of "Crossing the Bar" is an instance of the first sort, and so (to pass to prose for a moment) is the dream of Love, Sleep, and Death in Landor's *Pentameron*; on the other hand the elaborate apparatus of the *Roman de la Rose* might be said to make of the main action of the poem a kind of gigantic conceit,—though of course one has no desire to extend the term in just that fashion.¹⁰ Little myths of Cupid and his conduct, or mythopoetic explanations of physical beauty like that cited a moment ago, are typical instances of narrative conceit in the Petrarchan lyric.

So much for the conceits which are based on verbal or imaginative figures. But there is another group, as I have said, of even more interesting conceits which are not imaginative in the sense that they are not concerned with sensuous images, but which are related to the imaginative conceits much as the so-called "logical" figures of the rhetorics are related to figures of the metaphorical group. Even more definitely than those we have been considering, they are based on an intellectual process which is called in to aid in the expression of lyrical feeling. Sometimes they invert a logical process, for the sake of greater subtlety or wit, and we have paradox; sometimes they pursue it rigorously, to outcomes either serious or humorous, or exalt it to a genuine metaphysical quality. Of Renaissance paradoxes one of the most common is to the effect that the lover suffers sorely from his passion, but enjoys his suffering more than any other

¹⁰ In like manner the more elaborate sort of Homeric or epic simile, existing for its own sake, might be called a conceit after its kind.

pleasure; or again, he is silent because silence expresses love better than words. Others, less superficial and conventional, like Shakespeare's promise to quarrel with himself because he will not love his friend's enemy, exemplify the fact that a conceit which is essentially dependent on a bit of eccentric intellectual exercise may nevertheless be saturated with personal feeling.¹¹ The sonnets of the Petrarchans also furnish abundant examples of the more directly logical process. In one form of it (pretty close, sometimes, to paradox) the poet reasons that he does not need to use art to describe his beloved, since to give the facts is all-sufficient. Another bit of familiar lyrical logic is based on the allegation of identity of lover and beloved,—as when Shakespeare argues that the woman who has forsaken him for his friend still loves him alone. It is a question whether, in cases like this, the logic means more than playing with words—like many a sophistical exercise; but in other instances it represents without question real emotional fact. Of the higher metaphysical type of conceit one might take for example the notion that the image of the absent beloved is seen in the persons of those present to the lover's eye. This is an experience so familiar to those who love, that a reader may be expected to apprehend it instantly, without any circuitous process of logic; but the sonneteers elaborate it in the manner of the conceit,—arguing, for instance, as Sidney does: "I admire other beautiful ladies, but it is only because in them I find and love Stella." It is this type of conceit, I need hardly observe, which brings us closest to the later development of the lyric and to the modes of thought characteristic of Donne and his followers.

After this analysis of the subject it seems desirable, though not unhazardous, to attempt the statement of a working definition. I suggest, then, this: a conceit is *the elaboration of a verbal or an imaginative figure, or the substitution of a logical for an imaginative figure, with so considerable a use of an intellectual process as to take precedence, at least for the moment, of the normal poetic process*. And under the definition come, according to the foregoing analysis, types which may be summarized thus:

¹¹ Courthope treats the paradox type more fully than any other critic; see the *H. E. P.*, vol. iii, p. 106. He makes a separate group also—as do some other writers—of hyperbole; and perhaps this is worth while. I question, however, whether pure hyperbole is to be viewed as a conceit; for poetical purposes, if developed, it commonly takes the form of paradox or narrative myth.

- I. Verbal conceits.
- II. Imaginative conceits.
 - a. Metaphor-simile type.
 - b. Personification type.
 - c. Myth type.
- III. Logical conceits.
 - a. Paradox type.
 - b. Logical-metaphysical type.

Whatever the defects of this tentative definition and classification, I may be allowed to emphasize the fact that at least they are not of *a priori* devising; they are not due to any preliminary theory, or the desire to apply existing rhetorical schemes to the subject, but were arrived at by the purely inductive method of analyzing all the principal conceits in a group of sonnet sequences, and observing into what elements or groups they seemed to fall. And of course my definition does not shut out the possibility of others, which may represent the facts that seem most significant to other readers; for we shall all admit that these phenomena of poetry are not like the genera and species of physical nature, for which a high degree of fixity and mutual exclusiveness may be assumed. The only important question is whether a given analysis represents facts that are of interest to students of poetry.

Let me now outline some of the observed facts a little more specifically, in the case of the Sonnets of Sidney and Shakespeare. For convenience, instead of quoting abundantly from these poems, I cite brief prose paraphrases of the lines involving conceits,—a method which I admit does almost criminal violence to the beauty of many of the passages, but which seems to reveal the outlines of the phenomena we are studying more clearly. And even the æsthetic effects are not always lost; for though in some cases the nature of the conceit may be said to be veiled in the poetic phrasing, and the poem to be enjoyed in spite of it rather than on account of it, in other instances the charm inheres in the conceit itself, and is nowise lost in paraphrase.

I. VERBAL CONCEITS

In *Astrophel & Stella* there are but four or five sonnets which represent this type. Two of them are famous,—24 and 37, in which Sidney plays on Stella's married name: in the one he despises the rich fool who is to "grow in only folly Rich," in the other he pities the lady who is rich in everything save that she is Rich. I need hard-

ly observe that these puns, whether agreeable or not to modern taste, are by no means wholly trivial or unemotional, when taken in their context. In the 9th Sonnet there is a purely decorative play on the word "touch-stone;" in the 36th a play, antithetical in effect, on "raised" and "razed," and also a group of iterative conceits, evidently designed for mellifluous emphasis:

With so sweet voice, and by sweet Nature so
In sweetest strength, so sweetly skilled withal
In all sweet stratagems sweet art can show.

Finally, in Sonnet 63 is a bit of logical-grammatical word-play, Stella's "No! no!" being interpreted according to the principle that "two negatives affirm."

In Shakespeare's Sonnets the number of verbal conceits is slightly larger, but not in proportion to the length of the series. Most conspicuous here, of course, are the "Will sonnets," 135 and 136, respecting which I shall add nothing to the elaborate notes of Sir Sidney Lee and others.¹² In Sonnet 13 the poet plays on the word "yourself," alleging that you are not really *your self* save under certain conditions; in 44 on the word "thought" with its special meaning of melancholy; in 131 on "blackness" with reference to complexion and character; in 53, more subtly and without the effect of a pun, on the word "shadow" in its double meaning of visibly duplicated form and metaphysical image.¹³ All these conceits, with the exception of some of those on "Will," are certainly quite serious, and in some cases (as 44 and 53) are suffused with lyrical feeling. There is one purely playful example in Sonnet 145, akin to Sidney's 63rd, where the words "I hate" are saved from their effect by the addition of "not you." Obviously the verbal conceit is of slight importance in these two sonnet collections, compared with the place it has had in the discussion of Elizabethan poetry.

II. IMAGINATIVE CONCEITS

a. *Metaphor-Simile Type*

Under this head it is clear that I cannot give complete lists, not only because of the number of examples but because the line between

¹² See Lee's *Life of Shakespeare*, § 8 of the Appendix, and my variorum edition of the Sonnets, pp. 324-29.

¹³ Perhaps there should be added to the list a word-play involved in the expression "lines of life" in Sonnet 16, but there is no agreement as to the meaning.

the conceit and the normal figure is so tenuous. Of fairly marked conceits the following may be noted from *Astrophel & Stella*:

(26) I prognosticate my future by the stars in Stella's face.

(29) As weak rulers yield their coast regions as tribute, in order to keep their chief cities, so Stella lets Love occupy her lips, eyes, body, but not her heart.

(48) Do not turn your eyes from me, though they wound; it is better to slay quickly.

(76) Stella's eyes rise upon me like the morning sun, then dazzle and burn like noonday, so that I pray for the milder beams of bed-time.

(79) Let me sing the praises of a kiss: it is a heart's key, a nest of joys, a friendly fray, etc.; but here comes Stella: cease the service of praise, and pray for a kiss!

(82) Nymph of the garden of beauties, do not banish me from those cherries: I will only kiss, not bite.

(96) Melancholy is like night in respect to blackness, heaviness, ghostliness, etc., but worse than night in that it hates rest.

(97) As Diana cannot console the night, because of Night's hopeless love for Phoebus, so a certain lady tries vainly to comfort me while I miss the rays of my sun.

Shakespeare's Sonnets are much richer in metaphor and simile than Sidney's, but as it is more characteristic of his style to present one image swiftly and then pass on to another, the number of fully developed conceits of this type is perhaps not proportionally larger. The most remarkable group of them is to be found in the opening series of sonnets on the reproduction of beauty, in which every conceivable analogy is brought in to aid in the reiteration of the single theme,—often several in a single sonnet. The following are representative conceits both on this theme and others.

(1) You feed your light's flame with fuel of the same substance as itself, if your love is shut up to yourself.

(4) You are a profitless usurer if you do business wholly with yourself, and really cheat yourself of yourself.

(5-6) As flowers lose their beauty, but may save their fragrance through its being distilled in glass vessels, so you should make some vial sweet with your sweetness.¹⁴

(8) When you listen to music the sounds chide you for destroying by your singleness the harmony you should create by marriage and fatherhood.

(14) I prognosticate the future by the stars of your eyes. [Compare Sidney's Sonnet 26, above.]

(16) Many maiden gardens, not yet planted, would gladly bear you living flowers.

¹⁴This conceit reappears in Sonnet 54. Though I am rigorously avoiding the discussion of sources and analogues in this paper, I should perhaps note the interesting fact that the analogy of distillation has been traced to a passage in Sidney's *Arcadia*; see the variorum edition of the Sonnets, p. 28.

(26) My wit is so poor as to make my dutiful verse seem bare, but my hope is that your thought will receive it even though naked, until my better fortune shall clothe my tattered love.

(34) Your tears of repentance are pearls fit to ransom all ill deeds.

(52) As rich men look at their treasures only now and then, and as feasts are more valued for their rareness, and jewels for being set at intervals, so our separation will make the moment of revelation peculiarly blest.

(77) The thoughts you commit to paper are children born of your brain, which, if well nursed, will renew their acquaintance with you.

(86) It was not the full sail of my rival's verse that buried my thoughts in my brain, and made their womb their tomb.

(87) Your charter permits you to leave me; the bonds have expired; and indeed my patent is null, because you gave it when ignorant of your true worth.

(125) Accept my poor oblation, since it is not mixed with the "seconds" [inferior flour] of mere art.

(139) My love turns her looks away from me that they may injure others instead of me:—do not so, for since I am near death it is better to kill me outright. [Compare Sidney's Sonnet 48, above.]

(143) As a housewife forgets her crying babe to run after a fowl, so you persist in pursuing one who flies from you, while I keep chasing you from behind.

b. Personification Type

Here also it may be a debatable matter to distinguish between the normal figure and the conceit; and I suppose the Renaissance poets show less eccentricity in developing this figure than any other. Yet with Sidney, especially, there is a very characteristic sort of elaboration of the personification, by which he surrounds himself with a group of life-like figures—Virtue, Desire, Patience, Grief—who appear as vivid for the moment as those in Collins's pageant of the Passions, but who are developed with the ingenious mental twist characteristic of the conceit.

(4) If Virtue persists in admonishing me, I will show him one that shall make even him fall in love.

(25) I have proved the truth of Plato's saying that if we could once see virtue we should be inflamed with love for it; for Virtue, in order to awaken love for herself, has taken Stella's shape.

(38) I saw Stella's image when asleep, but missed it when awake; hence I summoned Sleep again—but the guest had slain the host.

(56) I will not learn of Patience to bear Stella's absence; let him make her come and listen patiently to me.

(80) I praise Stella's lips until my mouth refuses, fearing to flatter; but with one kiss they can teach my mouth that my praise is far short of the truth.

(85) When I come into her presence, let my various faculties play the part of apt servants,—eyes see her, ears hear her, arms embrace her, while my heart, their lord, takes royal tribute from all.

(94) Grief, find words for my complaint! Or, if deaf to the entreaty of such a wretch, wail for thyself at being lodged in a wretch.

(95) Sighs, you are faithful to me, though Joy, Hope, and Delight have fled, and Sorrow has been so fierce as to slay his own children Tears.

Shakespeare's personifications, in contrast, are for the most part simple and serious, the chief of them being the threatening figure of Time that looms so large throughout his sonnets; relatively few are developed unmistakably into conceits. The following might be so considered:

(51) When I am returning to you, no horse can keep pace with my desire; therefore Desire shall enter furiously into the race.

(65) Where shall Time's own best jewel be hid so that he cannot seize it for his chest?

(126) You hold Time in check now, but Nature cannot always keep you so; she must at length render her accounts, and give you up.

(128) I envy the keys of your spinet as they kiss your hand; if they have your fingers, give me your lips!

(141) My wits and senses cannot dissuade my heart from loving you; he leaves me to become your slave and vassal.

(151) Although Conscience is Love's child, Love is too young to know what conscience is.

c. Myth Type

This type characteristically involves the composition of a bit of narrative fiction, and is most often a development of the personification-conceit. For reasons implicit in what I have said of Sidney's personifications, the type is very characteristic of the art of his sonnets. Two uses of it may be noted especially: one in which the myth is devised in explanation of the beauty of the person celebrated, and another in which it is concerned with the operations of Love personified as Cupid or otherwise. Both these modes are, of course, highly conventional, but Sidney uses them with freshness and charm.¹⁶ For the first of them, note the following:

¹⁶ I must add, though the sonnets in question hardly come under the head of the conceit, that there is a related type also very characteristic of Sidney, which I am half tempted to call the conceit of the Dramatic Moment. In these sonnets there is a situation, with a bit of action and perhaps dialogue, representing just such a theme as in other instances may be developed by a myth. Sonnets 79 and 85, already instanced under other heads, exemplify this dramatic quality. See also 21, 30, 41, 47, 51, 66, 83, 92, 105. In the 51st the poet addresses other versifiers, and begs them to excuse his ears—his heart is busy with Stella; in the 83rd he addresses her bird, telling him that if he persists in toying with her lips his neck

(7) Stella's eyes are black, not for the sake of contrast, or to show Nature's skill, or to protect us from their dazzling, but in order that Love may wear mourning for those who die for her.

(22) Stella, riding horseback with other ladies, was the only one to expose her face to the sun, and the only one not burned by him; her he only kissed.

(102) Stella is pale, not—as the doctors say—from illness; it is because Love is making his paper white, to write his story thereon more freshly.

(103) Stella rode on the Thames; the breezes were so ravished that they lingered in her hair and disordered it when forced to go on.

(17) Venus having broken Cupid's bow and arrows in anger, Nature made him better ones from Stella's brow and eyes; playing with these, he shot me.

The last of these conceits, it will be noted, belongs also in the group representing the myth of Cupid, for which see also the following:

(8) Love, fleeing westward, sought refuge in Stella's face; driven thence by her coldness, he came to my heart, and, having burnt his wings with his own fire, cannot fly away.

(12) Cupid thinks he has conquered Stella because he seems to possess her face and voice; but to win the citadel of her heart is the main task.

(43) When Love wishes to conquer, he goes into your eyes; when he wishes to play, to your lips; when he wishes to be alone, to your heart.

(53) While I was engaged in a tournament Cupid tried to distract me by causing me to see Stella in a window, so that I forgot to fight.

Aside from these two groups I add a few other examples:

(10) Reason fought against Love and Sense, until they used Stella's rays as weapons; then he surrendered, and himself began to prove that love of Stella is reasonable.

(52) Virtue and Love are striving for the possession of Stella, and Virtue argues that the real Stella is her soul; let him, then, have the real Stella, but give her body to Love and me!

(74) I have no inspiration from the Muses, but write and speak agreeably because my lips were inspired by Stella's kiss.

Shakespeare's Sonnets contain about the same number of conceits of this type as the *Astrophel & Stella*,—that is, fewer proportionately; for the most part they are less characteristic and interesting. A few represent the extreme tendencies of the period toward eccentric ingenuity; the finest example, without question, is the one religious sonnet, No. 146.

(22) My heart dwells in your breast and yours in mine; yours I will keep as carefully as a tender nurse her babe; do not suppose that when you have slain mine you can have yours returned.

will be wrung; in the 92nd he addresses one who brings news of Stella, impatiently urging him to tell *everything* about her—and then tell it again! There is nothing in Shakespeare's sonnets precisely comparable to these vivid narrative elements.

(24) My eye has drawn the image of your beauty in my heart,—framed in my body, hanging in my bosom's shop; your eyes are windows through which the sun views the image; etc.

(27) When you are absent at night, my thoughts take a journey to you; meantime my soul's sight shows me your image, whose beauty makes the night beautiful.

(45) The elements of air and fire (viz., my thought and my desire) remain with you, the heavier ones with me; hence I sink down in gloom until the former, swift messengers, come bringing news of you; etc.

(46) My eye and heart contend in court for the right to see you; a jury of thoughts awards your outward part to the eye, your inward love to the heart. [Compare Sidney's Sonnet 52, above.]

(113-114) In your absence my outer eye is blind, showing me nothing but you, and refusing to deliver to the mind any presented object. Is this because my eye has learned an alchemy by which it turns everything into your image? or because my mind is a king which drinks whatever my eyes, his cup-bearer, prepare for him?

(146) The Soul is besieged by rebel powers, and starving in her castle; let her spend less on the mansion, and feed Death by letting the body starve.

(147) My love is a fevered patient, feeding on what is most injurious; Reason, my physician, has deserted me, angry that his prescriptions have not been taken.

Of the Cupid myths Shakespeare presents only one, in the two versions of Sonnets 153 and 154—both re-workings of a Greek conceit of the fifth century. Of myths in explanation of the beloved's beauty there are two or three:

(67-68) The fresh, genuine beauty of my love survives in an age of corrupt imitative beauty, only because Nature is preserving him to show what her wealth was in better days.

(99) In your absence I chided the violet with having stolen your breath, the lily your hand, the marjoram buds your hair; the roses blushed with shame, and one of them, who had stolen your breath, was devoured by a vengeful canker.

(127) My mistress's eyes and hair are black, in mourning for those who wear false beauty. [Compare Sidney's Sonnet 7, above.]

III. LOGICAL CONCEITS

a. Paradox Type

This type appears with about equal frequency in Sidney's and Shakespeare's sonnets. The leading themes, as in the Petrarchan lyric generally, are the actual paradoxes of the lover's experience: that his pain is pleasure and his pleasure pain; that for him winter may seem to be summer, or night like day; that his new story is always an old one.¹⁶ In Sidney's case there is also much emphasis

¹⁶ Conceits treating these themes may often, of course, be viewed as developments of the figure called *oxymoron*.

on the paradoxical nature of love, viewed now as servant to virtue, now to passionate desire. One may distinguish between these genuine paradoxes of fact and others of a more superficial—usually playful—character, like the 73rd and 81st of Sidney's, cited below.

(2) I am so much in love that the only wit I have left is employed in deceiving myself into thinking my suffering enjoyable.

(18) I am going bankrupt of wit and wealth, but only regret that I have no more to lose for Stella's sake.

(54) Because I do not display my love like others, it is said I cannot be in love; but they love most who fear to tell it.

(57-58) I have given Stella songs and poems designed to pierce her with my woes, but she sings and reads them so delightfully that in hearing them I myself rejoice.

(60) Stella is harsh to me present, but pities me absent; so I am blest when cursed, and cursed when in bliss.

(61) Stella tells me that true love does away with desire, so I have to refute the sophistry that I do not love unless I cease loving.

(62) Stella professes true love for me, but holds that love urges to cold virtue; if this is all, let her love me less!

(68) Stella spends her voice in seeking to quench my love; but while she speaks I am thinking only—what a paradise to enjoy!

(73) Stella is angry because I kissed her sleeping, and her crimsoned face is so lovely that I must kiss again.

(81) I praise Stella's kiss till she forbids me; if you really wish me to cease, stop my mouth with another.

(87) When I parted from Stella, her tears and sighs made me weep; yet since the cause was love, I should have been vexed not to be vexed.

Shakespeare's conceits of this type are at once fewer, more conventional, and more serious than Sidney's. With him the chief source of paradox, one might say, is the sense of identity or confusion between lover and beloved.

(20) You are both master and mistress of my love, having all the merits of women without their faults.

(35) I excuse your sins, even when you rob me, your adversary acting as your advocate.

(36) I must bear the shame alone: yet I love you so much that you and your good name belong to me.

(43) I see best when my eyes are shut; and the nights are bright days, for in sleep I see your image.

(49) With a view to your forsaking me, I offer testimony for you against myself. [Compare Sonnet 35, just cited, and the following pair, which I place here because of the similarity.]

(88) When you renounce me, I will take sides with you; for I prefer to advance myself by injuring myself in your behalf.

(89) Whatever reason you give for forsaking me, I will support; I will even quarrel with myself, since I cannot love him whom you hate.

(62) I am guilty of self-admiration; but when I see myself in the glass I know it is really you that I have been praising as myself.

(102) The more I love, the less I publish the fact. [Compare Sidney's Sonnet 54, above.]

(131) Your face, though considered unbeautiful, is fairest to me in its darkness.

(150) You make your very evil exceed the best, in my view; and cause me to love the more, the more I see cause of hate.

b. Logical-metaphysical Type

Of this special type Sidney offers comparatively few examples, though one or two charming ones. His main theme, for ingenious poetical reasoning, is that of the all-sufficiency of the subject as a reason for the want of art in his verse. (It will be noted that several of the sonnets representing this theme might quite as well be grouped under paradox, though I bring them all together here for convenience.)

(3) I do not need the art of other poets, having only to copy what Nature writes in Stella's face.

(6) Other lovers elaborate fancies regarding their passion; I say as much as they in saying simply that I love Stella.

(15) Petrarchan poets should cease to hunt for far-fetched ornaments for their verse; let them only look at Stella, and begin to write.

(28) Do not hunt for allegories in my verse: when I say Stella I mean just her.

(55) I have often sought the aid of the Muses to make my speech eloquent; henceforth I shall only repeat Stella's name.

(90) I am entitled to no praise for my own wit, for your beauty dictates all.

For other themes the following examples may serve:

(45) Stella, who will not pity my suffering, lately shed tears over the lovers in a story; I wish, then, she would think of me not as myself, but as a tragedy!

(59) You are so much more loving to your witless dog than to me, that I hope Love will soon altogether remove my wits.

(88) I remain faithful to Stella in absence, because of the inward eye of memory; formerly heart loved and eyes saw,—now the heart does both, and the united effect is stronger.

(91) While absent from Stella if I see other beautiful ladies they please me, but only as models of her; I love her in them.

In Shakespeare's Sonnets we may note first the same theme emphasized in *Astrophel & Stella*, on the poet-lover's art, with the same tendency toward paradox:

(38) How can my Muse lack invention when you are to be my subject-matter?

(76) Why is my verse so monotonous? Because I always write of you.

(78) Though other poets have your aid, I am your chief product, for *all* my art is from you.

(79) The poet who praises you stole all he says from your face and character; do not praise him, then, since it is you who really pay the praise he owes you.

(83) It is because you need no painting that I have been silent; I will not impair your beauty by celebrating it.

(84) Your highest praise is merely that you are you; to celebrate you, a poet should only copy.

(103) My Muse seems poor because the subject itself outdoes all invention.

Shakespeare's conceits under this type again elaborate the theme of identity:

(39) How can I praise you when you and I are one? It is better for us to be separated, that you may have your due as an individual; yet separation is only tolerable because it enables me to make twain out of one by praising you.

(42) I excuse you for loving my mistress, since you do it because I love her, and I excuse her in like manner; as you and I are one, she still loves me only.

Another theme of no little interest, which it is difficult to define clearly, is concerned with the image or "shadow" of the beloved, as found in other persons and in other ages. (See especially, among those noted below, Sonnets 31 and 106, which are surely among the loveliest in the collection.) This is perhaps the most subtly "meta-physical" of Shakespeare's conceit themes, and has been emphasized by Wyndham as Platonic in character;¹⁷ perhaps it is, in origin, though it cannot be said that Shakespeare develops it in a way to suggest its philosophic relations.

(31) You enshrine all my past loves; I see their images in you, and in you they all have all of me.

(53) You have a thousand shadows: whatever beauty is mentioned, it appears to be the shadow of your beauty. [Compare Sidney's Sonnet 91, above.]

(59) I would that I could find your image in antiquity,¹⁸ to judge whether it is true that everything repeats itself, and to see how the old world would have praised you.

(98) All the beauties of spring seemed only imitations of you, and it still seemed winter as I played with your shadow in your absence.

(106) When I read ancient writers' praises of beauty, I see that they were only prefiguring you; they could not describe you fully for want of sight, we cannot for want of skill.

I add a few more examples of conceit-reasoning on various themes.

(61) Do you try to keep me wakeful by sending your spirit to me at night? No, it is my own love that plays the watchman.

(92) I am certain to have your love throughout my life, for when you withdraw it my life will end.

¹⁷ See, in his edition of Shakespeare's Poems, and in my variorum edition of the Sonnets, the notes on Sonnet 37, line 10.

¹⁸ Compare one of Donne's most famous conceits:

I long to talk with some old lover's ghost
Who died before the god of love was born.

(115) My former statement that I could not love you more, was false, for love is a babe that continues to grow.

(122) Your tablets are in my brain; I gave the visible ones away because I would not seem to need aid to remember you.

(152) We are both forsworn in our loves; but I am the one most perjured, because I took oath of your kindness, truth, and beauty,—all a lie.

So much for this hasty survey of the types in these two great sonnet collections,—a survey which cannot have failed to seem painfully mechanical in method, but which I hope may have served to clear the way for profitable analysis, and even for sound appreciative criticism. Some of these conceits have been strongly figurative, some rigidly logical; some were already worn into commonplaces, while others represent the inventiveness of the poet; some are repellent to modern taste, if they could ever have been thought beautiful, while others involve some of the finest expressions of lyrical feeling. But all, I think, conform to our definition, in being due to an elaboration or interruption of the usual swift processes of the poetic spirit, for the sake of a special intellectual process.

It is clear that there is an interesting connection between this subject, as thus analyzed, and the old subject of the meaning and kinds of *wit*. Thus Courthope, as we have seen, discusses the conceit altogether under the term "poetical wit," and my own classification, without any original intention to that end, bears some resemblance to Addison's well-known classification of the kinds of wit. In the foregoing outline I have made no effort to distinguish between the witty conceits and the purely serious ones, but such a distinction can hardly have failed to suggest itself to every reader. It is obvious, for example, that Shakespeare is not at his best in the witty conceit, and that Sidney is,—that the latter, in other words, represents an aspect of art which we notice in so-called *vers de société*. It is also clear that, while we may find the light or witty conceit and the serious conceit to be wholly distinct from each other, we may at other times find the two moods blended, and be made to realize that the play spirit is not necessarily in opposition to that of profound feeling. Just such conceits of mixed or blended moods may be found in many familiar modern specimens of verse. When Holmes, for example, ponders on the relation between his own existence and the "Yes" once spoken by his ancestress Dorothy Q., he is, we know, smiling but not merely smiling. This subject is one that has had too little consideration in respect to poetry,¹⁹ and I

¹⁹ It is best discussed, so far as I know, in a too brief chapter of Professor W. A. Neilson's *Essentials of Poetry*.

cannot pursue it here. It is sufficient to note that a study of the conceit of the lyrists will add to our appreciation of its significance.

It is a serious limitation of my discussion, so far as it involves comparison of the work of Sidney and Shakespeare, that I have not included any account of the relation of their sonnet conceits to the *structure* of the sonnets. The outlines, for example, do not show for any particular instance whether the conceit forms the main theme of the sonnet, giving it body and controlling its development, or whether it is an incidental and comparatively brief portion of it. In general, the former condition is likely to be found in the great part of Sidney's collection, but is much less likely to occur in Shakespeare's; and the total effect is often very different, according as this difference is felt. Sidney, as all students of the Elizabethan sonnet know, followed fairly well the Italian conception of the unity and structural simplicity of the form. Shakespeare, on the other hand, viewed the sonnet as a progressive *composition*, in which one might pass freely from one imaginative notion or another in proceeding from quatrain to quatrain—or even within the quatrain; and with this conception of the sonnet is allied his well understood taste for hurrying with extraordinary swiftness from one metaphorical figure to another. Hence about a third of his sonnets are not characterized by the development of a single controlling image, and in a large number of the other two thirds the principal image does not wholly control the expression, but permits the fancy to dart aside on one or another rapid flight.²⁰ It follows from this that the outlines I have given of the sonnets

²⁰ Sonnet 125 is a striking case in point. In a sense it is a unit, on the single theme of love as concerned with realities and not with externals; but we pass from the metaphor of a gorgeous canopy to that of an insecure foundation,—from that of tenants who pay too much rent to that of gluttons who give up simple food for too much sweetness,—then to that of an oblation of flour not mixed with inferior grades; and the final couplet, instead of summarizing directly what has preceded, takes still another flight into the obscure figure of an “impeached” soul. On the other hand one may turn to Sonnet 106 for the perfect development of a single conceit, in which every line is true to the controlling image, and the couplet perfectly completes its evolution.

I take this occasion to note that such a contrast as that just noted between Shakespeare and Sidney suggests the possibility of applying the study of the different uses of the conceit to questions of influence and imitation. The two plausible sources for Shakespeare's original interest in the sonnet are the sequences of Sidney and Daniel, and it has been repeatedly pointed out that in form and style his sonnets are related with special closeness to Daniel's. The contrast just discussed further emphasizes this fact, for it is equally marked in the case of

of conceit may be said to represent fairly adequately the real nature of Sidney's, in so far as any prose paraphrase can represent the nature of poetry, but that in the case of Shakespeare the outlines are grossly misrepresentative of the impression produced by the reading of his sonnets. This is partly because many of his best sonnets would not appear in the list of conceits at all, whereas almost all of Sidney's would; it is also because the structural unity of Sidney's is best fitted to representation in paraphrase, and the fugitive, penetrating beauty of Shakespeare's phrasing is of course lost altogether.

There remains a final question, which I have already raised momentarily,—that concerning the lyrical *values* of the conceit. Our examination, I take it, will have shown that it is by no means wholly without use and charm,—unless, of course, we start out with a definition which assumes that a conceit is a piece of depravity. It is true that the poems we have examined are by two of the greatest lyrists of their age, but it is also true that the age of the sonneteers was not that most favorable to original and sincere uses of the conceit;—for these, according to common opinion, we must go forward to Donne, Herbert, and Crashaw. But even the lowest and most artificial form of conceit, word-play, we have seen used with apparent sincerity by both Sidney and Shakespeare; and the highest forms have been compatible with some of the finest lyrical expression of the period. The fact is, the common assumption that lyrists have used the conceit—even in the Petrarchan era—as a *substitute* for real feeling, is unwarranted. One need go no further than a tomb-stone or a newspaper obituary column to observe that conceits, exceedingly bad and exceedingly trite, may be used for the expression of feeling of the deepest kind. A prominent and able biographer of Shakespeare has distinguished himself by arguing from the conventional elements in Shakespeare's Sonnets that they represent no strong personal emotion, but Mr. Chambers—one of many attorneys for the defen-

Daniel and Sidney;—Daniel, that is, shows the same sense of continuous, progressive composition, and the same freedom in changing and mingling his images, that we have noticed in Shakespeare. When it comes to the nature of his conceits in themselves, there is not so much contrast; yet in the case of almost every type Shakespeare would still stand closer to Daniel than to Sidney. Both he and Daniel, for example, make a larger use of the metaphor-simile conceit than Sidney, and a slighter use of the myth and the paradox types. But this sort of comparison must not be pressed too far. It may be expected to have significance in connection with certain conventional kinds of conceit, likely to be borrowed or imitated; in other kinds one would say the matter is one of individual poetic psychology.

dant—replies that “any shy boy in love could have taught Mr. Lee that he secures a nearer and not a less near approach to his mistress by the choice of a conventional form for the overflowings of his romantic soul.” The suspicion that the conventionality of a conceit nullifies its emotional reality may, therefore, be put aside. At the opposite extreme are those who find emotional values destroyed in a lyric when too great intellectual activity appears to be involved in its composition. This is the common attitude of the eighteenth century toward the lyrists of the seventeenth. It was argued—and still is—that when the feelings are strongly moved the specifically intellectual processes are suspended, so that a lover or a sufferer must not be made to reason too acutely.²¹ The simple answer to this is that, for a certain number of persons, it is not at all true. I find this nowhere so well stated as in Professor H. J. C. Grierson’s fine introduction to his edition of the Poems of Donne: “To some natures love comes as above all things a force quickening the mind, intensifying its pure intellectual energy, opening new vistas of thought abstract and subtle, making the soul ‘intensely, wondrously alive.’ Of such were Donne and Browning.”²² This collocation of names, which has often been made merely with reference to the ruggedness and obscurity of the two poets, is highly suggestive for our special subject; for the poetry of Browning is, in fact, an admirable field for the study of almost every type of conceit (except, of course, the type of triteness). In other words, he commonly exemplifies the almost abnormal activity of the intellectual forces working together with the imagination for the expression of deep feeling.

All this, of course, does not determine what constitutes a *good* conceit, or what the true values of the conceit for lyric poetry may be. Nor must it be understood as obscuring the fact that the conceit gives special opportunities of evil to inferior poets, whether their peculiar sin be triteness or eccentricity. One must admit that the intervention of an intellectual process (the essence of our definition), in threatening to suspend our imaginative sympathy with the poet’s

²¹ Cf. *The Guardian*, (No. 15): “A lover will be full of sincerity, that he may be believed by his mistress; he will therefore think simply; he will express himself perspicuously, that he may not perplex her; he will therefore write unaffectedly. Deep reflections are made by a head undisturbed; and points of wit and fancy are the work of a heart at ease; these two dangers then, into which poets are apt to run, are effectually removed out of the lover’s way.”

²² Vol. ii, p. xxxiii.

main course of feeling, imperils his success. Yet we have seen that there come moments when the two processes, the imaginative and the intellectual, are fused in the working out of an idea that has meaning for both of them, and coöperate so perfectly that the reader shares this unity with the poet. The lyrical feeling of Keats is stirred deeply by his sense of the immortalizing power of art, and his mind is awakened to argue paradoxically, "For ever wilt thou love and she be fair." Browning is profoundly moved by the sense that the lover always desires to offer to his beloved a side of himself not known to the world, and his mind is set to work to query whether, if the moon should love a mortal, she would turn to him her hitherto unknown side. These are conceits which, whether because of familiarity or of consonance with our modern methods of poetic thinking, we do not call by the suspected name. But they represent methods which we have found in Shakespeare and Sidney, and which we might find in poets of a certain type in any age. On the other hand there are conceits in which the ingenious exercise of the intellect is very imperfectly fused with the poetic process, and of these we easily recognize the ill effects—at least in the poetry of the Renaissance, because its special kinds of ingenuity (particularly word-play and allegory) are so foreign to our taste. But in our time, as I might show if space and my subject permitted, we have plenty of examples still of the less justifiable conceit based on conspicuous cleverness. Doubtless the sins and the virtues of each age are only different phases of the same spiritual facts; certainly the lyric of the Elizabethan era found in the conceit, ill used or well, a notable means of characteristic self-expression. Especially it served to represent that age's curious conception of love as at once a high social convention and a vivid personal experience.

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